

An Evening with Dvořák

Thursday, February 8 – 8 pm

Adam Johnson, conductor

Whitney Leigh Sloan, soprano

Robert Uchida, violin

Rafael Hoekman, cello

All music by **Antonín DVOŘÁK** unless otherwise indicated

Slavonic Dance No. 1 in C Major, Op.46 No. 1 “Furiant” (4’)*

Romance in F minor, Op.11 (12’)*

Humoresque in G Major, Op.101 No. 7 (arr. Morawetz) (4’)*

Slavonic Dance No. 10 in E minor, Op.72 No. 2 “Starodávny” (5’)*

Cello Concerto in B minor, Op.104 – 1st mvmt.: Allegro (15’)*

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

Scherzo capriccioso, Op.66 (14’)*

Rusalka: “Měsíčku na nebi hlubokém” (Song to the Moon) (5’)*

BRAHMS

Hungarian Dance No. 19 in B minor (arr. Dvořák) (2’)*

Hungarian Dance No. 20 in E minor (arr. Dvořák) (3’)*

Hungarian Dance No. 21 in E minor (arr. Dvořák) (2’)*

Symphony No. 9 “From the New World” – 4th mvmt: Allegro con fuoco (11’)*

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

An Evening with Dvořák – Program notes

By the time the wider musical world had discovered **Antonín Dvořák** (1841-1904), he was already an experienced composer whose music had been performed regularly in and around his home of Prague. It wasn't until some influential figures in the cultural capital of the German-speaking world – Vienna – helped to get his works known beyond his native land's borders that he became one of the leading composers of his time.

“There is no doubt that he is very talented. And then also he is poor. I beg you to think the matter over.” So Johannes Brahms wrote to his publisher, Simrock, urging them to publish Dvořák's *Moravian Duets*. Simrock did, and both Dvořák and Simrock made a lot of money from them. And as the saying goes, a star was born. Dvořák borrowed another page from Brahms a few years later. Just as Brahms used his time as an accompanist to a Hungarian violinist to create his popular set of *Hungarian Dances*, so Dvořák borrowed from the wide range of Eastern European traditions to create his *Slavonic Dances*. Eventually published in two separate sets of eight dances each, the **Op.46** set was the first of them. Tonight's concert begins with **No. 1** from the Op.45 set, a “furiant” in C Major.

As he toiled away at the start of his career, when his music was not heard beyond the reaches of Prague, Dvořák may have chafed under the constraints of obscurity, but he knew enough not to let a good idea go unused. So when a string quartet he composed failed to gain any traction, he kept one of its themes, eventually re-using it to create a *Romance for Violin in F minor*, **Op.11**. It is the earliest work by Dvořák on tonight's program.

Dvořák was born in the small town of Nelahozeves, not far from Prague, and the music and traditions of his homeland never left him, no matter how far from home he strayed. They are always to be heard in his music, even in the works he wrote during his time in America, as head of New York's American Conservatory of Music. In fact, during his three-year stay in the U.S., Dvořák was often intensely homesick, and found respite in the Czech community he found in Spillville, Iowa, to where he would retreat when time allowed. It was there that he sketched out what would become eight short pieces for piano which he called *Humoresques*. The seventh of this set has gone on to become one of his most beloved melodies, and has been arranged in any number of ways.

Canadian composer Oskar Morawetz arranged the version of the *G Major Humoresque* we hear tonight, for cello, violin, and orchestra. Morawetz also used the same instrumentation for one of Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances* from his later set, published as **Op.72**. This dance, in E minor, is a west Slavic Lachian dance called a “starodávny,” which translates as “ancient one.”

Dvořák was able to visit Prague while on vacation from his American duties, and while there, he promised Hanuš Wihan, the cellist of the Czech String Quartet, that he would write a concerto for him. While Wihan did not actually get to premiere Dvořák's *Cello Concerto in B minor*, it has taken its place as one of the most popular works for cello and orchestra ever written. The ESO will present it in its

entirety on Sunday, March 18. Tonight, we will hear the first movement, with ESO Principal Cello Rafael Hoekman as soloist.

As Dvořák's reputation spread outward from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the composer found himself receiving a number of invitations. One of them was from London, where he went in March 1884, and had a number of his works performed to rapturous acclaim. Included among them was his **Scherzo capriccioso** for orchestra, a delightful single-movement work based on a vigorous theme in waltz tempo. "Nowhere else is Dvořák so absolutely and defiantly himself as in this magnificent work," writes Alec Robertson in his biography of Dvořák.

Dvořák composed a number of works for the stage, but the only one to receive regular performances outside his homeland is his opera **Rusalka**. A Czech variation on the Undine legend, of a water-nymph who falls in love with a mortal man, the opera premiered in Prague in 1901, and while its performances throughout Europe took a while to happen, it has been a great success all over the world. The tender and beautiful "**Song to the Moon**," an aria from the opera's first act, is sung by the title character, in imploring the Moon to tell the Prince of her love for him.

To have had Johannes Brahms as a champion and friend meant a great deal to Dvořák, and he maintained his friendship for the rest of Brahms' life. As a gesture, he took the final three of the 21 **Hungarian Dances** Brahms had written over the years, and orchestrated them – Brahms himself had only got round to orchestrating three of the earlier ones himself.

Before he left America for good in 1895, Dvořák looked homeward for one of his last and greatest compositions. He called his **Ninth Symphony "From the New World,"** a bit of a going-away present to his American audience – the work premiered at New York's Carnegie Hall nine days before Christmas in 1893. The final movement begins with a rousing and rhythmic main theme, but also recalls themes from previous movements as well.

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